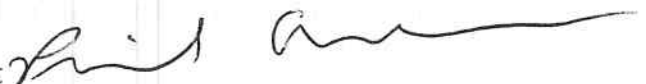


MEMORANDUM

November 7, 2009

TO: Councilmembers

FROM: Phil Andrews, Council President



SUBJECT: I-270 and the Corridor Cities Transitway

On Tuesday, the Council will recommend to the State whether to widen Interstate 270 from Shady Grove Road to the City of Frederick. The Council also will recommend whether the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT), which would link Clarksburg, Germantown, Gaithersburg and Rockville to the Shady Grove Metro, should be built as bus rapid transit or light rail. The Council should recommend adding two reversible lanes on I-270, and bus rapid transit for the CCT. Here's why:

Reversible lanes for I-270

Maryland's most recent proposal to address traffic-choked conditions on I-270 would add two lanes each way from Shady Grove Road to Route 80/Urbana, and one lane each way from Urbana to Frederick. Since the State's traffic projections show existing lanes could handle future rush-hour traffic northbound in the morning and southbound in the evening (see circle 48 of Glenn Orlin's July 21 packet), a better option is to limit widening to two lanes that would be reversible for use south in the morning and north in the evening. I-95 in northern Virginia uses this approach.

The new lanes on I-270 should be restricted to carpools, buses, motorcycles, and drivers paying a congestion-priced toll. The lanes would have faster average speeds than the other lanes because of their restricted access. Unlike the Inter-County Connector (ICC), where the high to very high tolls proposed would decrease use because they would apply to all vehicles at all times, only the additional lanes on I-270 would have tolls, and only those driving alone would pay them.

Adding two reversible lanes rather than four non-reversible lanes would reduce the estimated \$3.9 billion cost of widening I-270 by hundreds of millions of dollars, and reduce environmental and community impacts. In response to the questions included in the August letter I sent to the Maryland Department of Transportation on behalf of the Council, the State has agreed to study this option. The Council should recommend adding two managed reversible lanes as the preferred option.

Bus Rapid Transit for the Corridor Cities Transitway

Building the Corridor Cities Transitway as bus rapid transit (BRT) is hands down the better choice than building it as light rail – as detailed in Glenn Orlin's packet. BRT would cost far less to build – up to \$466 million less depending on the

alignment -- while carrying almost as many passengers. Since the County's Ride-On buses could join BRT buses in using the transitway, combined ridership could be higher than with light rail, and Ride-On passengers would not need to transfer, or to park in the very limited parking that would be provided. BRT is projected to have slightly lower operating costs, and could be built more incrementally than light rail. In addition, BRT would not need an adjacent maintenance/storage depot.

Getting the CCT built as soon as possible is crucial for Clarksburg, Germantown, and Gaithersburg West. BRT would be much more competitive for federal funding than light rail -- and thus more likely to be built in the near future -- because it would rank "high" (among the most competitive projects in the country according to Glenn Orlin) on the cost effective rankings -- \$7.43 to \$9.26 per passenger for bus rapid transit compared to at least \$16.04 to more than \$20 per rider for light rail.

BRT will be competitive for federal funding regardless of what the Council decides about additional development levels in the proposed Gaithersburg West Master Plan. Light rail, which requires far higher density than BRT to be cost-effective, would limit the Council's options regarding the proposed master plan. The Council should defer a recommendation on whether the CCT's route should be re-aligned through the Life Sciences Center until the Council finishes the Gaithersburg West Master Plan. The Council should recommend moving the CCT alignment closer to the Kentlands; this is not dependent on the Council's decision about Gaithersburg West.

Saving about a billion dollars by building reversible lanes on I-270, and bus rapid transit on the Corridor Cities Transitway would free up (at least) state funds for other needed transit projects, such as the 100-plus mile system of bus rapid transit lanes, proposed by Councilmember Elrich, on congested roads such as Colesville Road to the Silver Spring Metro, and Georgia Avenue from Olney to the Glenmont Metro. Increasing bus service on Rt. 355, and expanding MARC commuter rail service on the Brunswick line that connects to Union Station also would help relieve traffic congestion and provide more commuting choices. Given the crucial need for more transit capacity and the far lower cost of the Corridor Cities Transitway, especially as BRT, the Council should recommend that the CCT be built before I-270 is widened.

Clearly, additional transportation funds will be needed for the State to be able to fund its share of these and other much-needed projects. This Council and County Executive are on record in support of an increase in Maryland's gasoline tax, which has not been increased nor adjusted for inflation in nearly two decades, to fund transportation projects.